



## Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 93

### REFRACTIVE SURGERY

Laser eye surgery is becoming a more common procedure to correct visual problems. For non-aviation personnel the **only accepted** refractive surgical procedure for accession and retention is **photorefractive keratotomy (PRK)**.

PRK is a procedure where a series of fine laser ablations are used to re-sculpt the external surface of the cornea to correct visual acuity. PRK has been extensively studied, including ongoing Navy studies, and is approved by the FDA. Best results occur in patients over 21 years old, who have stable refractions, mild to moderate nearsightedness or farsightedness, and mild to moderate astigmatism.

### **Appointment, induction, and commissioning guidelines for refractive surgery:**

A waiver is required for cadets, recruit applicants, OCS and non-aviation DC applicants who have had PRK. A waiver is likely to be granted by CGPC if the following conditions are met:

- All pre-operative, operative, and post-operative medical records are supplied for review;
- No complications as a result of the surgery, such as decreased night vision, glare sensitivity, halos around lights, or worsening of the pre-operative best vision due to scar formation;
- Pre-operative refractive error did not exceed +8.00 to -8.00 diopters (spherical equivalent) in either eye;
- Refractive stability as demonstrated by less than 0.50 diopter change over two separate ophthalmologic exams at least three months apart;
- Surgery was completed at least one year prior to waiver request;
- Accession standards outlined in the Medical Manual, section 3-D and 3-E are met.

## **Retention guidelines for refractive surgery:**

-- **Members**, with the exception of aviation personnel, may have the PRK procedure performed after following the usual Coast Guard elective surgical procedure policies. After surgery members must meet all retention standards in the Medical Manual, section 3-F.

-- **Aviation duty**: refractive surgery will continue to be career disqualifying for all aviation personnel and waivers will not be considered. The U. S. Navy is currently studying a small population of aviators who have or will receive the PRK procedure. Contingent on a favorable outcome in this study, it is possible that in the future, PRK may be acceptable within the aviation community.

-- **Diving duty**: PRK is acceptable for diving duty personnel. All diving personnel and those actively engaged in diving activities must meet all vision standards outlined in the Medical Manual, section 3- H .

## **General Guidelines:**

-- All PRK procedures performed in the civilian sector will be at the member's own expense. All costs of travel, lodging, meals and other miscellaneous expenses associated with the procedure must be borne by the member.

-- All cases, whether performed at a military treatment facility or in the civilian sector, will require prior leave approval by the member's commanding officer. An entry concerning authorized leave for the procedure will be made in the member's personnel file.

-- Five days of recovery is usually adequate post-surgical recovery time.

-- Obtaining PRK in the civilian health care sector, resulting in less than favorable outcomes, will result in a determination of an act "not in the line of duty" and administrative separation from the Coast Guard. Commanding officers will ensure that an entry in the member's medical record (SF600) documenting the member's responsibility for cost, rehabilitation, retention standards and disability liability is made.

-- Members who have had the PRK procedure will require reevaluation by an ophthalmologist to determine post surgical stability. Refractive stability must be demonstrated by less than 0.50 diopter

change over two separate exams at least three months apart.

-- LASIK and radial keratotomy (RK) are not accepted procedures for Coast Guard members

-- Non-aviation members who have had refractive eye surgery prior to the effective date of the ALCOAST defining Coast Guard policy on refractive eye surgery must continue to meet all retention standards in the Medical Manual, section 3-F.

The Department of Defense is instituting PRK programs in some of their hospitals. Members of the Coast Guard will be eligible for surgery at these centers, but it may be 3-5 years before any significant number of Coast Guard personnel can expect to be evaluated, prioritized and treated. Access and liability guidelines will be published when the procedure becomes available.

Regards, FL Ames



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